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Letters to the Editor

Italian Connections

I'm flattered by all the attention ("Tale of Intrigue," page one, Aug. 8) from your imaginative Mr. Kwitny, especially by the remarkable notion that I was somehow the "real" representative of the U.S. in Italy for a while in 1981. But, alas, I wasn't, and that story, like virtually everything else in the article, is silly and wrong. Mr. Kwitny apparently believes that I managed to bypass the official channels of Italo-American diplomacy, including our embassy in Rome. Nothing of the sort took place, and I told him so. Indeed, with regard to the trip to Washington of Mr. Piccoli, the Secretary General of the Italian Christian Democratic Party, I was the one who told him that it could only be arranged through the American Embassy. Contrary to the account Mr. Kwitny gave, that is how it was done. There were no secret "back channels" for his trip.

Mr. Kwitny's main gripe seems to be that I am an anti-communist (true enough) and that I have been effective (I hope it's true, but I don't think I've achieved the importance that he generously, albeit foolishly, ascribes to me).

He seems to believe that I got the Billy Carter story from Italian military intelligence officials (false, and I told him so; I worked with Mr. Pazienza—obtaining an incriminating tape on the subject—to *confirm* the story, refusing to accept it as true without such confirmation), that I dispatched a person on behalf of the U.S. government to talk to Yassir Arafat (false, and I told him so; anyone familiar with my views knows that I am opposed to any talks with Arafat, open or secret), and even that the U.S. government, through me, planned an anti-Libyan operation in conjunction with the Italians (of all countries! Italy, after all, had regularly sent captured terrorists back to Libya on Alitalia jets placed at their disposal . . . this too, false, as I told him). He also seems to find it odd that my firm did some consulting work for the Italian government, and got paid for it (although unfortunately not as munificently as his source believes).

Mr. Kwitny also decided not to report some of the other things that I told him, most notably that almost all the stories he recounts already appeared, well over a year ago, in the Italian press (abundantly repeated, with colorful embellishments, by the Bulgarian "media" and by some Soviet publications as well), and that I have sued several Italian publications for criminal libel. Those cases are awaiting trial in Rome and Milan.

I suppose it can be written off to a combination of political animus and the effects of the August heat.

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On Aug. 8, in conjunction with Jonathan Kwitny's page-one series "Tale of Intrigue," you carried an article concerning me by an unnamed staff reporter who identified himself to me as Mr. Kwitny. Evidently he was trying to show that I had relied on occult and sinister sources to frame the Bulgarians for the attempted assassination of the pope. Since he himself has relied on just such a source to do something of that sort to me, I would like to set the record straight.

Considering the brevity of our two phone conversations, Mr. Kwitny managed to turn around, overlook or forget quite a lot.

For instance, he writes that while I "angrily denied" having lunched with the Italian super-spy Francesco Pazienza—and who wouldn't be angry at a whopping lie from a notorious con man?—"she does acknowledge two meetings with Mr. Pazienza's boss at Sismi, the late Gen. Giuseppe Santovito." Read in context, this implies that I had conferred confidentially with the then head of Italy's military intelligence service about the Bulgarian connection to the papal shooting.

Had Mr. Kwitny asked—he didn't—I would have told him how and when I met Gen. Santovito on two occasions: not the same as "acknowledging two meetings" with him.

The first time was well before the pope was shot: April 1, 1981: publication day for the Italian edition of my earlier book, "The Terror Network." Gen. Santovito invited me to lunch that day at Passetto's restaurant in Rome (where we sat elbow to elbow with its usual crowd of politicians and reporters), mainly to tell me how wrong I was about the Red Brigades' relations with the PLO.

The second and last time was in the summer of 1982, a full year after Gen. Santovito had been fired from Sismi, when I accompanied an NBC TV team to interview him. (He appeared to be drunk, and was so comically cautious that the interview was worthless.)

Among Mr. Kwitny's other selective quotations was a neat thrust about my alleged relations with Gen. Santovito's favorite confidant, Francesco Pazienza. Though I assured Mr. Kwitny unequivocally that I had never laid eyes on or dealt with Pazienza, nevertheless Mr. Kwitny wrote as his perceived truth not only that Pazienza had "helped supply" me with material about the papal shooting, but that I had actually used it.

Though he claimed to have heard this from Pazienza in person, Mr. Kwitny failed to mention a recent declaration of Pazienza's to the opposite effect. Through his lawyers, last April 4, Pazienza told the press that any rumors of his "participation" in the papal plot or "laying a false Bulgarian trail" were "absurd."

The absurdity is particularly noticeable in my case because of a time factor that Mr. Kwitny ignored as well. Both Pazienza and his patron, Gen. Santovito, had been thrown out of their jobs and thoroughly discredited before I even began to work on the papal assassination plot for the Reader's Digest. I started in October 1981. In Mr. Kwitny's own words, Pazienza's "career at Sismi came to an abrupt end" the previous summer.

Inasmuch as Pazienza was in fact stripped of all operational power in Italy a good four years ago—and the Italian press has long since published a great deal more about him than Mr. Kwitny did—I am puzzled by his evidently impelling need to write two exceedingly long articles about Pazienza so late in the day.

What really baffles me, though, is why he should have tacked on a whole special article to bring me into it. I have never been on friendly terms with any intelligence service, as the persistently critical (if not downright hostile) attitude of the entire Western intelligence community toward me attests. And I have most certainly never had anything to do with any part of the Pazienza story.

Why, then, would Mr. Kwitny go out of his way to involve me?

Mr. Kwitny expressed surprise when I put it to him that somebody somewhere was deliberately planting lies about me. I wish I could say that I was surprised by his readiness to print them.

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(The Journal stands by its stories—Ed.)

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